

ploded in the washroom before we went out to demonstrate. The Zionists patrolling the area stormed the school on hearing the explosion. We felt utterly ridiculous afterwards for not having been more careful; one of us could have been in the washroom by chance when it exploded.

Any time the Zionist authorities got wind of our activities in the school, they would storm it. One time they were particularly brutal. They cordoned off the school and a whole troop of soldiers charged into the classrooms. Not one girl escaped being brutally beaten up; the eyes of one of my classmates were smashed by a soldier. Girls that tried to hide under the desks were pulled out by their hair and beaten. The soldiers lined the teachers up against the corridor wall, along with the principal, and threatened to shoot them if they tried to call for help, or moved to defend the girls. I remember that about 200 girls had to be hospitalized for broken arms or legs, or concussions. The central hospital had to be cleared to make room for these cases.

The number of injured would have been much higher had not the women of an area known as Shaja'yeh (literally meaning 'the brave') intervened; they were well-known for their daring confrontation of Zionist soldiers. About a hundred of these women, bare-handed, started to fight the soldiers surrounding the school. They were especially outraged that the ambulances were not allowed in to take the injured to hospital. I remember that one woman actually tried to wrench a machine gun out of a soldier's hand. When she couldn't manage that, she settled for grabbing his helmet off his head. She started to run, kicking the helmet ahead of her as the soldier ran after her. That year they stormed our school four times, closing it down for days or weeks at a time.

The years when Guevara of Gaza was leading the PFLP's struggle in the Strip were truly among the highlights of Palestinian struggle. I cannot describe the immense feeling of pride when we read the headlines about how the Zionists ruled Gaza by day, but the resistance ruled it by night. We paid a heavy price however. Every day we would go to the main hospital in Gaza, to find out who had been martyred. The bodies of the martyrs were laid out on a cold slab of marble in a bare, dismal room in the hospital, to be identified by

the family. There was always an air of sympathy for the families and outrage at the fascist authorities. Sometimes when a particularly well-known militant had been martyred after living in hiding for months, and inflicting heavy losses on the enemy, word of the martyrdom would spread like wildfire. The hospital square would be overflowing with people inflamed with outrage. They would storm the hospital, lift the body high above their heads and march with it in a demonstration, defying the enemy soldiers' guns and all. I remember all of this as if it were yesterday.

MY BROTHER'S MARTYRDOM

We were brought up by our parents like most other people. We were not rich, nor were we poor. We never lacked anything, and our parents prided themselves that they were always able to provide for our smallest needs. It therefore came as a shock to them when they found out that my youngest brother was a member of a resistance organization. It was everybody's general impression that you are forced to take up that road in life only because you need money. Our family found out about my brother's political affiliation only six months before he was martyred.

One day he rushed into the house and told them that somebody had confessed in jail and brought his name up; he had to go into hiding. For six months we contacted him only with difficulty in out-of-the-way places. He studied for his high school certificate during these six months, gave in his examinations and was accepted at Cairo University's engineering faculty. The Zionists came to our house a few times and threatened us, to try and find out where he was hiding, but to no avail. Sometimes they would come after midnight, storming the house and turning the kitchen upside down. Soldiers with the machine guns poised would be on the roof, at the doorstep, in the front yard, and in the house.

Then one day, in the afternoon of January 1, 1970, they stormed our home for the last time. I was alone; the rest of

the family was at the market. Our whole neighborhood was surrounded. The soldier in charge told me that my brother had gotten into a fight and was down at the police station. I was to inform my family to come. When my family was informed, they went and found out that he had been dead for five days. His body was torn apart by machine gun bullets. When he died, he was 21 years and three months old.

Later on we found out that a collaborator had discovered my brother's hideout and informed on him. The Zionists surrounded the room where he was hiding. A battle ensued, and he managed to kill the commander of the Zionist patrol and wound several others, before they killed him. Our comrades had found out who the collaborator was; they vowed that he would be dead and buried before my brother was buried, and they carried out their vow. The next day the collaborator was shot dead, and his family buried him before we even knew about my brother's death.

I will not recount the details of mourning and sadness, but I will just mention one positive thing that emerged from this tragedy. The shock of my brother's martyrdom made my family realize more concretely what the revolution was all about. The change was not so dramatic that I dared to tell them about my own participation as a party member, but I did notice a change in their attitude towards others whom they knew played a role in the revolution. They were more receptive, more sympathetic, more willing to help out or contribute. Contrary to what the Zionist authorities expect, the pain and tragedy inflicted on our people have not made us cower. Rather this has led to the mobilization of even broader sectors of our people to fight against the occupation.

Finally, I left the Gaza Strip not because I was deported, pursued or wanted, like thousands of others. I left to study at the university in Beirut. Now, because I have been outside the occupied territories for so long, I have lost the right - according to the Zionist authorities - to return to my homeland, Palestine.

Um Samir is still a militant, still a comrade. She retold the stories of her past experience with modesty and sometimes embarrassment at what she believed were insignificant events. Her contribution, sacrifices and devotion to the cause, however, like those of thousands of other men and women, are the ingredients of the formula for the liberation of Palestine. ●